

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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LEAD POISONING ADVISORY PANEL WEIGHED DOWN BY LEAD INDUSTRY'S FRIENDS

Markey Report Details Lead Industry Take-over

Washington, DC: Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, today released a report entitled "Turning Lead Into Gold: How the Bush Administration is Poisoning the Lead Advisory Committee at the CDC." Rep. Markey, along with Democratic Reps. Nancy Pelosi, Rosa DeLauro, Henry Waxman, Robert Menendez, Earl Blumenauer, Hilda Solis, and Eddie Bernice Johnson, also released a letter to Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tommy G. Thompson asking for information related to reports that the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Advisory Committee on Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention has replaced many of its members with individuals who are affiliated or openly sympathetic with the views of the lead industry. The Advisory Committee is charged with assessing the scientific data and recommending changes to CDC policy to prevent lead poisoning, including assessing whether the blood lead level limits are adequate. These blood lead levels are then used to determine which children are at risk for adverse health effects, and how much remediation must be done to ensure that a lead-contaminated site is safe.

Rep. Markey said, "It makes you wonder, if the Bush Administration was seeking advice on whether the sun revolved around the earth or vice versa, would it take Galileo off the committee and replace him with the Inquisition? Since a key issue for this advisory committee is whether low-dose exposure to lead will adversely affect childhood development, I am concerned that noted academic experts are being replaced by individuals who appear to have conflicts of interest that could prevent them from providing advice that will lead to the most protective health standards for our children."

According to the report, which details the recent changes to the panel and backgrounds of the individuals involved, the following changes have recently occurred:

Reappointment rejected:

- Dr. Michael Weitzman, (716) 275-1544, Department of Pediatrics, University of Rochester, and Pediatrician in Chief, Rochester General Hospital, member of the panel since 1997 and the author of numerous peer-reviewed publications on lead poisoning.

Nominations rejected:

- Dr. Bruce Lanphear, (513)-636-3778, Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio, currently the Sloan Professor of Children's Environmental Health, conducted numerous epidemiologic studies of lead-contaminated house dust and residential soil.

- Dr. Susan Klitzman, Associate Professor of Urban Public Health at the Hunter College School of Health Sciences author of numerous peer-reviewed publications on lead poisoning.

Nominated to the Advisory Committee:

- Dr. William Banner, expert witness for the lead industry who believes that lead is harmful only at levels that are 7-10 times as high as the current CDC blood lead levels.
- Dr. Joyce Tsuji, principal scientist for Exponent, a company whose corporate clients include ASARCO (which is currently disputing EPA's assumptions that ASARCO is the source of elevated arsenic and lead in residential soils in El Paso and fighting Superfund designation) and King and Spalding, a DC law firm representing several large lead firms.
- Dr. Kimberly Thompson, Assistant Professor of Risk Analysis and Decision Science, Harvard School of Public Health, affiliated with the heavily industry-funded Harvard Center for Risk Analysis (HCRA). HCRA has 22 corporate funders with a financial interest in the deliberations of the CDC Advisory Committee on Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention and less stringent regulation of lead. Three of these funders have superfund sites with lead contamination - Ciba-Geigy Corporation, FMC Corporation, and Monsanto.
- Dr. Sergio Piomelli, Professor, Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, researcher who reportedly disagrees with current blood lead standard set by the CDC Advisory Committee in 1991.

Lead Poisoning

- According to recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates, 890,000 U.S. children age 1-5 have elevated blood lead levels, and more than one-fifth of African-American children living in housing built before 1946 have elevated blood lead levels. The major sources of lead exposure are deteriorated paint in older housing, and dust and soil that are contaminated with lead from old paint and from past emissions of leaded gasoline.

Massachusetts Lead Poisoning Background

- Massachusetts enacted one of the nation's first state lead poisoning prevention laws in 1971. Since 1971, Massachusetts property owners have been required to permanently control specified lead-based paint hazards in any housing unit in which a child under the age of six resides. See http://www.centerforhealthyhousing.org/html/mass_lead_law.htm
- According to the CDC, approximately 1300 children in Boston are identified annually with blood lead levels high enough to adversely affect cognitive development and behavior. While the overall prevalence of such cases declined substantially in the 1990s, continued use of blood lead data for surveillance purposes will be essential in Boston and other jurisdictions to focus resources on high-risk neighborhoods and to achieve the health objective. See <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5017a3.htm>

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